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ABSTRACT

It is important for parents to teach their children to associate learning with sweetness, enjoyment, and pleasure. Suggestions to help parents make reading to their children a special time are: (1) make reading a "snuggle time"; (2) visit the library once a week; (3) develop a regular reading time with children; (4) select appropriate reading materials; and (5) do not stop reading to children just because they reach a certain age. The literacy crisis is enormous in California and throughout the United States. Parents can help their children and their community to confront this growing problem by becoming a literacy volunteer; becoming informed about the library's literacy programs; assisting children in recognizing the value of literacy; and helping their children overcome reading barriers. (RS)

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ED 377 474

TOPIC: EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPING READING SKILLS

BY: REED MARKHAM, PH.D

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I read recently about a Jewish tradition where a child is introduced to learning by taking in his hands a slate covered with honey. As the child licks the honey off the slate, the alphabet appears. The child is taught to associate learning with sweetness. I remember on some winter evenings when I was a child my father would quietly retire to his favorite chair and pick up a book. My father would let me see his enjoyment while reading and he read to me.

Janene Baadsgaard, author of A SENSE OF WONDER observed that "books aren't a substitute for living, but they can do much to add to life's richness. When we become absorbed with living fully, good books serve to intimately enhance our wonder. That child is fortunate who can associate both pleasure and parental attention with the raw materials of a book- words."

Today is a great time to read with your child.

Here are some suggestions:

First, remember to make reading time snuggle time. According to

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Baadsgaard, "we need to sit close together and put our arms around each other to really enjoy a good book together. Reading with children is a wonderful gift of our precious time. Children who feel that we have time for them will be more likely to think that they are valuable and worthy of that gift."

Second, visit the library once a week. There are several great libraries located in the county with dedicated librarians prepared to assist you and your child. Even if your child is not reading yet, check out some picture only books. You can sit down with your child and make up stories to go with the pictures.

Third, develop a regular reading time with your child. According to Thomas Armstrong, author of AWAKENING YOUR CHILD'S NATURAL GENIUS, "studies of children who entered first grade already reading indicate that their parents invariably read to them right from infancy. Select a regular time during the day- just before bedtime is a good choice- and share with your child some of the best children's literature available."

Fourth, select appropriate reading materials. Lawrence Greene, author of 1001 WAYS TO IMPROVE YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOLWORK urges parents to

"select reading materials from the library or bookstore that are slightly below your child's current reading level. Ask the teacher or librarian to recommend appropriate books, then involve your child in the selection process. Choose materials that your child finds interesting."

Fifth, don't stop reading to your child. Irene Thompsen, Supervisor of the Children's Room at the Norman Feldheym Central Library in San Bernardino, says that "reading to children is tremendously important. I have a ten year old and I still read to him. Many parents stop reading to their child when they are older."

"I met Juan for the first time at a tutoring session in one of San Bernardino's branch libraries" recalls Weldon, a retired chemical engineer. Juan raced through the alphabet and some easy rhyming drills. But when Weldon asked Juan to read aloud a book with four letter words, the trouble started. Juan hunched up with stress and struggled to sound out unfamiliar words like "buzz" and "ship." He had difficulty with consonants at the end of words. "I watched with frustration as Juan lost his confidence in reading," Weldon remembers. When they had finished the lesson, Juan had a blank, withdrawn look on his face. Juan's score on the lesson was below a second grade reading level. Weldon gave Juan some words of encouragement and let him know that they would work together to help him become a successful reader. Weldon is a volunteer at the public library literacy center.

Richard Levesque, Coordinator of the Project Literacy Service Center at Cal Poly Pomona says that "one in five Californians can't read at a functional level." The literacy crisis is enormous in California and throughout the States. What can we do to help our children and community to confront this

growing problem:

First, become a literacy volunteer. According to Levesque, "anyone who has the interest and time can serve as a literacy volunteer. Volunteers will receive the necessary training and can become certified as a literacy trainer." Becoming a literacy volunteer is a great opportunity for students who are planning a career in teaching. Levesque observed that "volunteers benefit from the experience of enriching someone's life and assisting them with the basic ability to read. Becoming a literacy volunteer is tremendously rewarding!"

Second, become informed about the library's literacy programs. The San Bernardino City Library Literacy Center offers training in english as a second language, adult basic education, citizenship preparation, and a program for completing your GED. According to Tom Gueston, a Tutor Trainer for the San Bernardino City Library Literacy Center, "we offer programs to help those who have difficulty reading. We have family programs that involve children and parents reading together. The program helps children to start hearing words. Through early intervention, reading problems are reduced."

Third, assist your child in recognizing the value of literacy. Dr. Rita Weisskoff, language arts consultant to the Chidren's Television Workshop's

literacy project says that "reading is a part of life: from the notes on the refrigerator to the stories we share with our families. Reading and writing are not just for scholars, authors- other people- but for everybody. They serve a purpose and can be fun. Most children, especially those with reading problems, need to experience the personal rewards of literacy." Parents need to help their children to understand that reading can be fun and rewarding.

Fourth, help your child overcome reading barriers. Some children feel that reading is boring. If your child feels this way, help them to locate some books on topics they find interesting. Some children feel that reading is too hard. If this is a problem, read with your child and locate books that fit their reading level.

RESEARCH SUMMARY

Are you aware of the reasons why children don't like to read?

1. "It's no fun." Let your child see that you read for pleasure.
2. "It's not important." Help your child recognize that reading is a significant part of their lives.
3. "I don't have the time." Assist your child in organizing their schedule to include some "quiet reading time."